

Westminster Presbyterian Church, San Jose, CA

Safe Church Policy

Ensuring a Climate of Safety

Policy Statement

As a caring Christian community, we at Westminster Presbyterian Church (WPC) are committed to providing a safe and nurturing environment for all participants and for all volunteers and employees who minister in the congregational life of WPC. The intention of this policy is to protect children, youth and vulnerable adults from abuse in any form and to ensure that those working with them are not exposed to false or unwarranted charges of abuse.

Standards of Conduct

Employees and volunteers who work with children, youth or vulnerable adults are tasked with guarding the physical and emotional safety of those in their care and with being alert for signs of each individual's well-being.

- Common expressions of affection and affirmation (including hugs and pats on the back) or physical care (including diaper changes and first aid) are appropriate in this as in any other community of caring Christians. Care must be taken, however, that physical expressions of affection are not excessive or imposed on another individual.
- To the maximum extent practicable, there shall be visual access into each room in which activities with children, youth and vulnerable adults are being conducted.
- To the maximum extent practicable, employees and volunteers who work with children, youth or vulnerable adults shall work in non-familial teams, with two or more adults present at all activities.
- No employee or volunteer shall engage in any act of abuse or harassment including touching, interacting with, or otherwise communicating with a child, youth, or vulnerable adult in any way that is intended to be sexually stimulating, emotionally demeaning, exploitative or harassing.
- No employee or volunteer shall use corporal punishment, intimidation or shunning on an individual associated with any program or activity conducted by WPC.
- If an employee or volunteer meets with an unaccompanied vulnerable individual to conduct a private discussion, that meeting shall be held at WPC when the church is open for scheduled group activities or shall be held in a public place.
- At no time shall any employee or volunteer meet with a sole vulnerable individual at WPC unless there is at least one other employee or volunteer in the building. Although the identity of the vulnerable individual may remain confidential, that employee or volunteer must be aware of the time and location of the private meeting.

- On any church-sponsored activity for which WPC arranges transportation, an employee or volunteer may transport children who are not in their family as long as there are two or more children in the vehicle. Children will only be picked up and dropped off as a group at WPC or at another designated location. Exceptions to this clause may be made in the case of emergencies or with written permission of a parent or guardian.
- Volunteers and employees will not accept any form of financial remuneration from people they visit, or to whom they provide services or care. In recognition that some care receivers may desire to express their appreciation, small tokens of appreciation may be accepted by volunteers and employees, provided they are unsolicited and have minimal monetary value.
- Mutual consent is never possible when one individual is in an authority position and the other is a participant, whether a child or an adult.

Allegations of Abuse

- Any individual who has a reasonable suspicion of abuse toward a child/youth/vulnerable adult must promptly report the suspicion to a teacher/leader, the Minister or the Clerk of Session. If the report is made to an activity leader, that individual must report to the Minister or Clerk of Session. Then together they will inform the appropriate authorities.
- If a report of abuse is made to a Mandated Reporter, that individual must tell the Minister and inform the appropriate protective agency or police within 48 hours.
- If the alleged offender is an employee, a report shall be made to the Clerk of Session. If the alleged offender is the Minister or Clerk of Session, the report must be made to another Mandated Report.
- In any case of alleged abuse, the Minister or the Clerk of Session shall keep proper written documentation of the allegations and proceedings.
- The Minister and/or the Clerk of Session shall be responsible for maintaining contact with the police and with the family of the alleged victim and for determining further actions in consultation with the Session.
- The Minister or the Clerk of Session shall speak on behalf of the Session in the event of an allegation that requires speaking to the congregation and/or the community.
- Westminster Presbyterian Church will cooperate fully with government authorities in the investigation of any suspicion of child, youth, or vulnerable adult abuse.

Implementation

- A copy of this policy and the [Covenant of Care](#) shall be provided to each employee and to each volunteer participating in any program or activity involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
- Each employee shall submit to WPC a signed copy of the [Covenant of Care](#) and shall submit to a background check and fingerprinting as a condition of employment.

- Each applicant for employment shall submit to WPC a signed copy of the [Covenant of Care](#) as part of his or her application for employment and shall be willing to submit to a background check as a condition of employment.
- An individual who seeks to be a volunteer in any program or activity involving children, youth or vulnerable adults shall submit to WPC a signed copy of the [Covenant of Care](#) and shall be willing to submit to a background check as a condition of volunteer service.
- An applicant who is a minor shall have the [Covenant of Care](#) co-signed by a parent or guardian.
- Organizations using the facilities of WPC shall either show proof of a comparable policy or agree to abide by WPC's *Safe Church Policy*.

Administration

- The WPC Personnel Committee shall administer this policy under the authority of Session.
- All documentation associated with the policy (including applications, background checks, and documentation associated with allegations of child abuse or misconduct) shall be strictly confidential and shall be kept secure by the Safe Church Coordinator.
- The Safe Church Coordinator shall be responsible for the conduct of appropriate clearances on employees, applicants for employment and volunteers participating in programs or activities involving children, youth or vulnerable adults. The clearance process shall allow applicants the opportunity to correct or respond to information obtained from the background check. For purposes of the initial implementation of this policy, the Personnel Committee shall determine with Session approval the manner in which initial clearances shall be conducted.
- Each employee and each volunteer who works with children, youth and vulnerable adults shall be requested to annually review this policy and sign the Covenant of Care.
- Session shall annually review and amend this policy as required.

Congregational Awareness

- The congregation shall be informed of this policy and reminded annually with an announcement during worship on VBS or Youth Sunday or other designated Sunday.
- This policy and the [Covenant of Care](#) shall be made available on the WPC website.
- Information regarding this policy and the [Covenant of Care](#) shall be published annually in the Westminster e-newsletter.
- A copy of this policy, and the [Covenant of Care](#) shall be provided to each participant in church membership classes.
- A review of this policy shall be included in all training and information sessions for Elders, Deacons, Sunday School Teachers, Nursery Care Volunteers, Leaders of Children's and Youth groups, Leaders of Children's Choirs and Youth Choirs, and Employees

- Copies of this policy shall be available in the church office.

Training Workshops

Training Workshops will be offered several times a year as needed. Please contact Nan Notor, Safe Church Coordinator, for further information on upcoming Safe Church workshops.

Effective: 9/21/2010
Revision approved: 3/20/2018

Addenda

- Definitions of Terms
- Covenant of Care

Definitions of Terms

- **Child or youth** – a person who is under eighteen years of age.
- **Vulnerable adult** – a person who, because of his/her age, disability, or other circumstances, whether temporary or permanent, is in a position of dependence on others or is otherwise at a greater risk of being harmed by persons in positions of authority or trust relative to him/her.
- **Abuse** – violence, mistreatment or neglect that a vulnerable individual may experience while in the care of someone they either trust or depend on, such as a parent, sibling, other relative, caregiver, guardian or other adult in a position of trust. Abuse may take place in any environment in which they interact.

Abuse includes but is not limited to:

- The actual infliction, the threat to inflict or create (or the permitting of another to inflict or threaten to inflict or create) a physical or mental injury upon an individual, by other than accidental means, or the creation of a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental function.
- A misuse of power and a violation of trust. It may be psychological abuse, attempting to dehumanize or intimidate older adults; financial abuse, using their money or property in a dishonest manner; or physical abuse which includes any acts of violence inflicting pain, injury or mental distress.
- The refusal to provide care necessary to the health of a vulnerable individual, or the abandonment of a person, in one's care.

- The commission or permitting of any act of sexual exploitation or any sexual act upon a vulnerable individual, including risqué jokes, innuendo, unacceptable visual contact, unwelcome casual touch, unwelcome and inappropriate hugs.
 - Manipulation of a vulnerable individual by a responsible adult for the satisfaction of personal needs and desires.
- **Harassment** – may be verbal, visual, or physical, including suggestive remarks and gestures, or other unwanted attention which is emotionally demeaning or exploitive.
 - **Mandated Reporters** – a legal category which includes clergy and clerks of session according to California state law. However, the PCUSA Book of Order adds Elders and Deacons as Mandated Reporters who are legally required to report any suspected incident of abuse.
 - **Employee** – an individual who is hired or called to work for WPC for salary or wages.
 - **Volunteer** – an individual who provides services to WPC without monetary remuneration.
 - **Teacher / Leader** –a volunteer or employee who:
 - is at least 18 years of age,
 - devotes significant portions of his/her time and energy in faithful church service,
 - has been cleared by WPC to work with children, youth or vulnerable adults, and
 - has gone through orientation and training in order to hold a ministry position. (e.g. Sunday School teacher; youth leader; Deacon)

The Covenant of Care

Westminster Presbyterian Church, San Jose, CA

As an expression of the high and holy duty that Christ has offered to me as a leader, teacher, or helper to children, youth or vulnerable adults, I promise

- *in all my relationships with children, youth or vulnerable adults, to follow appropriate action as defined by my training orientation;*
- *to refrain from inappropriate physical contact,*
- *to use appropriate language,*
- *that I will not harass or intimidate others,*
- *to show no bias based on gender, ethnic background, skin color, intelligence, age, religion, sexual orientation or socio-economic status, and*
- *to respect confidentiality and privacy, unless a child, youth or vulnerable adult is in danger,*
- *to report as required, any suspicions of abuse to the Pastor, Clerk of Session, a child protection agency or the police.*

I have read and agree to abide by Westminster Presbyterian Church's Policy for Ensuring a Climate of Safety.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Witnessed by: _____ Date: _____

(Head of Staff, Clerk of Session or other authorized person)